

THE NEGRO IN THE SOUTH

Address by W. W. Finley, President, Southern Railway Company, at the Commencement Exercises of the National Religious Training School, Durham, N. C., May 23, 1913.

MR. PRESIDENT AND STUDENTS OF THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS TRAINING SCHOOL:

In speaking to you today it shall be my purpose to say some things that I hope may be helpful to the negroes of the South rather than merely to make an address that will be pleasing to my audience.

Great responsibilities rest upon this and similar institutions in the Southern States. The graduates of such a school are likely to become leaders of the negro race at a time when its future destiny in the South is largely dependent upon wise leadership.

The great majority of the negroes of the United States live in the Southern States, and this condition will probably continue for many years to come, although the Census figures show that, largely as a result of the movement of white people into the South and the removal of negroes to the North, the proportion of negro population to white is decreasing in each Southern State. The two races will continue to live in the South and it is to the interest of both that this should be so, for in the development of this section there is work for both. The future of the negroes of the South will be largely dependent upon themselves, for, just as surely as they fall short of the economic requirements of their surroundings, just so surely will their places be taken, sooner or later, by others. This has already been going on to some extent. Mr. Alfred Holt Stone, in a book written some years ago, presented a long array of instances in which negroes had been crowded out of employments which they had formerly filled. I have no doubt that all of us know personally of such instances that are not due to any prejudice against the negro, but simply to the fact that, in these instances, he has failed to hold his own.

When we seek the reason for this I believe we will find that it is largely due to misdirected education. This brings me up to the truth which I wish especially to emphasize today—that education should be such as will fit the individual for the opportunities that are open to him.

It is of particular importance, I believe, that this should be borne in mind by all of the students of this school who may become either teachers or preachers. It should be your constant effort to guide the education of the rising generation along practical lines and, above all, to avoid creating in the minds of your pupils dissatisfaction with the opportunities that are open to them.

You have the advantage of living in a progressive section of the United States in which the rapid development of manufacturing and agriculture is constantly presenting new opportunities. Manufacturing establishments are enlarging the field for the employment of members of your race, but your widest opportunities are in farming and in domestic service.

A revolution is going on in Southern agriculture. Diversified farming is rapidly supplanting the one-crop system, and the farm hand of the future must know something more than merely how to grow a single crop according to old methods. He must understand a variety of crops and must know something about

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different kinds of live stock. Improved implements and labor-saving machinery are coming into larger use on Southern farms, calling for farm hands who know how to use them and to take care of them.

In most localities in the Southeastern States there are abundant opportunities for the negro on the farm. Reliable and efficient farm labor is always in demand. The opportunities for the negro on Southern farms are not, however, limited to employment as a hired laborer. The United States Census figures show that, in the Southeastern States in 1910 there were 673,066 negroes operating farms, either as owners, tenants, or managers, this number showing an increase of 23 per cent over the figures for 1900. There were in the Southeast in 1910, 155,776 negroes classed as owners of farms.

The South will continue to offer abundant opportunities for the negro on the farm, but I believe that if he is to succeed as a farm operator—either as owner, tenant, or manager—a higher standard of efficiency will be required in the future than in the past. This will be true not only because of the progressive tendency of farming all over the South, but also because the agricultural advantages of our section are becoming better known in other parts of the United States and in Europe with the result that increasing numbers of farmers from other localities are moving into the South. Many of these are men of moderate means who buy relatively small farms on which they and members of their families do most of the work. As this movement continues prices of farm lands will advance, making it more difficult for the negro to become a farm owner. Relatively few negro boys will be able to avail themselves of a thorough agricultural college education, and most of those who have this advantage will probably find work as teachers. The boy who is to remain on the farm will generally have to rely upon such education as he can get in the rural common schools. It can not be hoped that these schools will thoroughly equip their students as scientific farmers. I believe, however, that every country school for colored children throughout the South should give the rudiments of an agricultural education and should impress upon its pupils the importance of improved methods of farming. It should teach them how to continue their studies after leaving school by reading the agricultural bulletins and other publications issued by the State and Federal Agricultural Departments and experiment stations. I believe, also, that every Southern farmer should subscribe for, and read regularly, a good agricultural paper published in our section and dealing with the peculiar farm problems of the South. A difficulty in carrying out such a plan for primary agricultural education as I have suggested at the present time, is the inadequate supply of teachers qualified to give agricultural instruction. It should, therefore, in my opinion, be the aim of schools devoted to the training of colored teachers to give special attention to qualifying them to teach agriculture, mechanical work such as is done on the farm, and domestic service. Such teachers will then be able to equip the students of rural schools for all branches of work on the farm.

While the kind of people who are in demand are those who can do things and do them well, morality, industry, and reliability are even more important than mere skill in doing things. The development of these qualities is the function of schools such as this.

Religious training can be made a most helpful factor in the material progress of the race if it emphasizes the fact that true religion is not merely emotion, but manifests itself in personal morality. The race will advance in the measure that its individual members lead clean lives and are sober and strictly honest

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in all their dealings. The shortcomings of the individual will often be charged up against the race as a whole. For this reason the morality of the individual is the concern of all, and the leaders of the race should strive to build up a public opinion among the whole body of negroes that will not tolerate or excuse immorality.

There are intelligent men who believe that education for the negro is an injury to him and to the members of the white race with whom he is brought into contact. This belief, in my opinion, is based upon experience with negroes who have had the wrong kind of education. They have been educated for opportunities that do not exist and have gotten the idea that they are fitted for something better than the work that is at hand for them to do.¹ Lack of appreciation of the dignity of manual labor and of pride in work well done are failings that have been frankly recognized by such a leader of his race as Booker Washington, who illustrated this by a story of a negro at work in a cotton field who suddenly threw down his hoe, looked up at the sky, and said: "Oh, Lawd, de cotton am so grassy, de work am so hard, and de sun am so hot, dat I b'lieve dis darkey am called to preach." Washington warned his race against this attitude toward work in his Atlanta Exposition speech, when he said: "Our greatest danger is that, in the leap from slavery to freedom, we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life."²

In addition to appreciation of the dignity of labor, thus emphasized by Washington, success in the occupations that are open for the negro in the South involves industry and reliability. There is no place in a properly conducted business enterprise for the man or woman who does the least possible amount of work in the day or who is shiftless and unreliable. One of the most frequent complaints about negro labor is that it is unreliable. This is a failing that educational institutions such as this should seek to overcome by drilling into their pupils the imperative necessity for dependability. It is not always the most brilliant man who makes the greatest success. It is often the man of moderate ability who keeps constantly at work and who can always be depended upon to be in his place and to do his full duty whether his employer has his eye on him or not.³

The wonderful progress of the South within the past thirty years will continue. In this progress the negro has an important part to play if he can measure up to his opportunities. If he fails he must step aside. But I do not believe that he will fail. There are many fields in which he has shown his capacity, and, with proper training, he will find the range of his opportunities constantly enlarging. In the Northern and Eastern States some lines of work formerly in the hands of native Americans have been almost completely abandoned by them and taken up by immigrants. In some cases the Americans first gave way to one class of immigrants and they, in turn, have given way to another class. I believe we shall witness something like this in the South—that, as our section develops in material prosperity, the white man will, in large measure, abandon some lines of work for higher forms of industrialism, and that his place will be taken by the negro. In other words, that both races will advance together, with the white man in the lead. In this advance the negro can not hope to start at the top. He must work his way up. He must demonstrate his capacity for higher duties and responsibilities by proving his efficiency in more subordinate places



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and by showing capacity for the opportunities now open to him. The rate of his advancement will depend largely upon his success in raising the standard of the race for morality, industry, and dependability.

Considered merely in its natural aspects, the Christian religion has been the most important influence in the progress of mankind that the world has known. The system of morals which it inculcates is the basis of all that is best in civilization. Within the sphere of its influence, therefore, this religious training school has an important part to play in the advancement of the negro race. Its students learn here the principles of Christianity and their practical application to all the relations of life. Each one of them should carry from the National Religious Training School an influence for the uplift of the race and for the development of those qualities of industry, dependability, and right living which must be the foundation of true and lasting progress.

We can not commend too highly the public-spirited men of North Carolina and of other States who are serving as officers and as members of the Advisory Committee of this institution. By lending their assistance in shaping its policies they are performing a patriotic service of high value to the South. Under their wise guidance I feel sure that the National Religious Training School will measure up to its great responsibilities and will exercise a constantly widening influence for good, and I wish it prosperity and the largest measure of success.